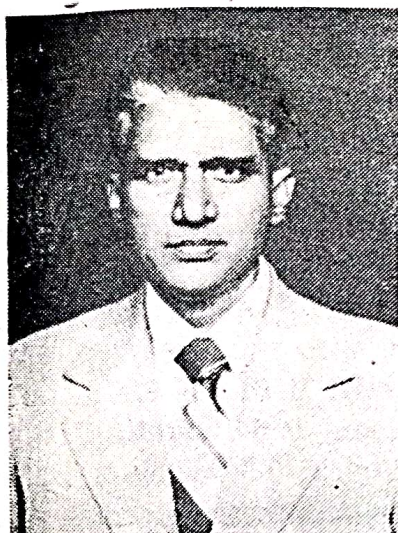




BETTER BOOKS IN ENGLISH— WHY NOT IN REGIONAL LANGUAGES

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Some time back, Mrs. Manorama Jafa, in one of the issues of *Writer and Illustrator* emphasised that better children's books are available in the English language only. I agree to this statement to a certain extent. As Rajaji once pointed out, the English language is a gift to India by Goddess Saraswati. In fact, the English language has many advantages. It is spoken and written at all levels of education. In the West, children's literature developed as a discipline, and so has its influence in undeveloped countries, where the English language is in usage.

Secondly, the English language is widely used in the world. So, the publishers can dare to invest huge amounts on book production, since there is an assured income. So, when the print order is in thousands, the publisher naturally takes every care in the matter of content, editing, design, get-up, binding and lastly, the packing too. With these inborn advantages, the English language is fortunate enough to produce better books in India and Western countries.

Thirdly, most of the writers are in the metropolitan cities and have had greater opportunity of expert guidance from the veterans like Shri Shankar, and other senior writers with exceptional skills in writing. That is why a band of creative writers, particularly writers like Mrs. Pratibha Nath, Sigrun Srivastav, Manorama Jafa, Indira Ananthakrishnan, Surekha Panandiker, Ira Saxena, Nilima Sinha developed under the roof of the Children's Book Trust. The writers like R.K. Murthi, K.C. Batra,

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A.K. Dutta have contributed significantly to the modern trends in children's literature in English. The secret behind their success is the organisation of workshops frequently by Smt. Manorama Jafa, under the able guidance of Shri Shankar.

Lastly, all the great illustrators, who work for children's literature such as Jagdish Joshi, Subir Roy, B.G. Varma, Hebbar, Mrinal Mitra, who won many national and international awards are city-based. Most of the publishers who bring out English books are utilising the services of the great illustrators, since they can afford to pay higher remuneration. These are some of the reasons for producing better books in the English language.

Another argument is that "publishers in India encourage creative and original writings in English much more than in Indian languages." This is not fully true. Regarding the physical get-up, the books in regional languages are lagging behind, but as far as content is concerned, Indian writers of regional languages are not far behind anybody or any language in the world.

No doubt, there are original writings for children in the regional languages. But our children's literature, particularly in regional languages, is largely flooded by epic tales, folk tales told and retold, stories from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Panchatantra* and *Aesop's Fables*, with didactic element. In all parts of the country, mainly at the end of the last century and beginning of this century, the stories of moral value, including the Bible stories were popularised. These stories inculcated the reading habit for a few generations.

But Western culture slowly gave new ideas to the writers, drawing themes from their own social life. Rabindranath Tagore was the pioneer in writing new types of stories for children in Bengali. His stories

which deal mainly with day to day events and sentiments are quite different from the traditional stories. Tagore's writings have influenced other Indian regional languages. In Telugu, Chinta Deekshitulu, K. Sabha, Alaparti etc. wrote stories cutting new ground. Likewise, in Tamil, Al Valiappa, Kalu Gopala Krishnan, Periaswami Tooran, Thambi Srinivasan etc., produced children's stories independently. In Hindi, Hari Krishna Devsare, Jai Prakash Bharati, Brahm Prakash Gupta, Yograj Thani, Sarla Bhatnagar produced original stories, which can stand the test of time. In Malayalam, Evoor Parmeshwaran, Sippy Phillipuram, P. Sankaranarayan; in Marathi, Nirmala Deshpande, Vinda Karankidar, Pandit Upendra Tripathi, Vidyut Prabha Devi; in Gujarati, Sundaram, Gijubhai Badheka, Dhiruben Patel, Suresh Dalal and others contributed to children's literature with the modern outlook.

Original and creative writings are available in most languages. Due to lack of proper encouragement and guidance, much of good writing is not seeing the light of day. Workshops for writers, co-publication, streamlining the Operation Black Board Scheme etc., would give a boost to children's literature.

The right and royal way for the development of children's literature on sound lines is the regular organisation of workshops for the writers, editors, illustrators etc. at the national and regional levels. It is also necessary to occasionally organise workshops for layout artists, printers, publishers and book sellers for proper motivation, since the production and promotion of children's books need special care and treatment.

The Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC), under the able and energetic guidance of the Secretary-General Mrs. Manorama Jafa organised a series of writers' workshops in New Delhi

from 1977 onwards and shaped a band of creative writers with innovative ideas. To our credit, she organised writers' workshops in Bangkok, Dhaka, Colombo, Khatmandu etc. successfully. In the beginning of this year, the Children's Film Society of India in Bombay organised a workshop for writing stories for children's films.

Some time back, Andhra Pradesh Balala Academy organised a workshop for writers in the Telugu language, as a result of which the writers trained in the workshop, produced very good books and bagged the NCERT awards in three successive competitions.

At present, the AWIC is concentrating on training writers in English and Hindi languages, since both the languages have a nationwide coverage. To produce good writers, the AWIC can give some guidelines to organise workshops for the regional languages also. Separate workshops may be conducted for illustrators, editors, layout artists etc. Then there would be a greater possibility of getting better books in regional languages.

For lack of proper support, children's literature is suffering from many angles, particularly in regional languages. After forty years of independence, we have not succeeded in attaining even 40% literary rate and it is still lingering at 36.12%. Absence of school libraries, particularly at primary school level, is one of the reasons why the reading habit among school going children has not developed. Children's books necessarily need illustrations, colour printing, good quality of paper, attractive binding etc. But they have a small print run. This situation raises the price of the book, which restricts the sale of children's books, due to the low purchasing capacity of Indian parents. Lastly, the children's book market is divided linguistically, and that too, with the monopoly of a few publishers.

This has resulted in poor production of children's books in India. There are about 300-400 such books in all the languages put together. This is 3% of the total book production even though children up to the age-group of 14 years constitute more than 40% of the total population. According to the survey conducted by the Council of Applied Economics and Research, there are about 3,000 active publishers in India. Out of them, 2,700 are small publishers, 200 medium publishers, and 100 major publishers. Out of them, only 10 publishers are exclusively for children's books.

Now, the only solution for the publication of best children's books at cheaper rates is the co-publication programme. About two decades ago, the Southern Languages Book Trust experimented with this venture successfully. In the co-publication programme, the expenditure on illustrations, plate-making, layout, processing etc., would be considerably reduced. The National Book Trust, India, through its Nehru Bal Pustakalaya and other series, launched this plan for its own publications. It is also known that the National Book Trust is planning to launch a new project of co-publication, with commercial publishers and literary organisations in the coming few years. This will certainly help to bring out better books in regional languages also. Along the same lines, the Children's Book Trust published books in Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil languages. This can be extended to other languages too.

As a sequel to the New Education Policy (1986), Operation Blackboard is a well-conceived scheme drafted by the NCERT and operated by the Ministry of Human Resources, Government of India. This scheme provides minimum literary facilities to the primary schools. About 5.5 lakh primary schools in the country are proposed to be covered under the scheme. The NCERT has formulated some guide-

lines for the purchase of children's books for them. The guidelines ensure that books should be chosen keeping in mind the fact that they are meant for children of the age-group of 6-11 years. They should be attractive and well-written, preferably multi-coloured illustrations that reflect local-specific environment, especially human figures, and should help children to foster national integration and culture. These books should be printed on good quality paper of minimum 70 gm, and the size should be easily manageable by children, preferably of a size that can fit in a school satchel. The printing should be done on a standard size with a minimum range of 20 pt to 16 pt Devanagari or equivalent. The books should be centrally stitched, section sewing with a cover of pulp board art paper. They should be well designed.

There is a great opportunity to produce better books for children. But nobody bothers to produce quality books. Instead, they try to persuade the purchasing authorities to take the available books, which do not meet the above guidelines. If the Government takes up this issue seriously, and forces the purchasing authorities to follow the guidelines strictly, there is every possibility to get better books not only in English but also in regional languages. It is time the loopholes in the great Operation Black Board are plugged.

To cite an example, a scheme like Operation Black Board was designed by Andhra Pradesh Balala Academi in the year 1985, and implemented in 40,000 primary schools of the Andhra Pradesh State. The scheme was called *Prati Badikee Blala Saraswati Peetham* (A Library to every primary school). The scheme was operated very successfully and with the blessings of the scheme the nuclei of children's libraries were established in all the elementary schools. For some selected schools, audio cassettes were supplied. This scheme was

in force for two years. This was followed by the national Operation Black Board Scheme.

Due to the recent advance in science and technology, rapid expansion of audio visual (AV) materials have become a source of emotional and entertainment value. In one of its documents, the UNESCO measured the learning and retention of information, as mentioned below :

Learning by taste	1%
" by touch	1.5%
" by smell	3.5%
" by sound	11%
" by sight	83%
Retention three hours later	
Visual and audio	85%
Visual only	72%
Audio only	70%
Retention three days later	
Visual and audio	15%
Visual only	20%
Audio only	10%

In such a case, visual and audio has greater immediate impact than the printed document.

Secondly, F.M. Lancaster, an American Information Scientist, stated that there will be a "paperless society" in the near future. It was predicted that by the end of this decade, books would be replaced by silicon micro chips and that the contents of the entire library can be condensed into a collection of chips of the size of a single paper back. Moreover, micro chips of the size of a single paper back. Moreover, micro chips and reading material in microform are cheaper than books. The terminal will replace the bookshelf and paper be supplemented by chips, cables and waves. A developing country like India would take some time to reach that stage. But one must be careful about the threats and fast growth of audio-visual materials and the influence of mass media over the printed word. In fact, books with illustrations make

a greater impact on children's minds. In fact, there should not be a children's book without illustrations. Illustrations in books attract and catch the eye of the reader. The publishers, who bring out English and Hindi books venture to appoint great artists for illustrating and designing books. The same is the case with editor. A good editor will act as a catalyst between the author and illustraor.

In light of the above observations, every publisher should open a wing for the production of video films, based on the books already produced by him. Then only can he face the threats of the latest developments in electronics, and its outcome of a paperless society.

Even though about 70% of the world population lives in developing countries, people have to depend on imported books, and consequently, the cultural values of developed countries. Reading habits which shape the child in the early age, forces the culture of other countries on them and they have no opportunity to identify strongly with their own culture and language in the books that come their way. This situation has to change by mobilizing the local resources. The UNESCO, under the motto "Books for All," initiated programmes of coopera-

tion and technical aid to encourage publication of children's books in developing countries. "UNESCO experts in the field share technical know-how and information with local book profession facing every kind of problem from production and distribution, to the development of children's libraries and promotion of the reading habit." Efforts are geared up to increase the national book production with the developing countries in accomplishing their goals. UNESCO has arranged the publication of literary translations of little-known masterpieces from less extensively used languages into widely spoken languages.

Again, in India, Raja Rammohun Roy Foundation, an autonomous organisation, sponsored by the Government of India, with a motto "Books for millions at their doorsteps," encourages the purchase of children's books in English and regional languages and gives special grants for the development of children's libraries.

Considering all these facts, the advantages that the English language is enjoying may be extended to regional languages, for producing bodies as good as these in English. This seminar should contribute something for producing better books for children in the regional languages of India.